

232 W. Main Street
Orange, Virginia
August 7, 1956

Dear Mr. Price:

I have looked into the matter of the last slaves held in Pocahontas County and have come up with the real "dope" on it. The information came from my fathers sister , Aunt Betty Moore, wife of Pearl Moore of Knapp's Creek.

The story of the slaves is a long, long, story and it goes back to a pioneer settler of Pocahontas County, one Peter Lightner. This Peter Lightner was, apparently, a man of some considerable wealth and affluence. He was a man who had large land holdings in the upper Knapps Creek Valley. On such holdings as these it was only natural that he kept some slaves. In fact, the evidences of three slave "huts" are still to be found on the Pearl Moore property, and the slave graveyards can be found in the region back of the Dennis Dever homeplace. Here lies, also, the dust of the Peter Lightner's.

Peter lightner beget three daughters; Phoebe, Polly and Elizabeth. Following the normal course of events these daughters grew up to womanhood and married. When the first wedding approached, about 1815, Peter Lightner made a journey to Philadelphia. This journey, by horseback, was made for the purpose of purchasing a wedding dress, and the other necessary accoutrement for an elegant colonial wedding.

Peter, being a man of some considerable foresight, and not desiring to make the long trip again bought not one, but three wedding gowns. In due time they were all used. Phoebe married William Cleek, Polly married Sheldon Clark and Elizabeth married my great-grandfather, Joseph Sharp. My aunt, Mrs. Pearl Moore, still has a part of one of these dresses in her possession.

As the trip to Philadelphia would indicate, Peter Lightner was a devoted father, and so as a wedding gift he presented each daughter with a colored "handmaiden". These handmaids lived with their respective families and grew to maturity.

Joseph and Elizabeth Sharp raised a family. Among their children was my grandfather Abraham or "Abram" Sharp, and therein lies the tale. The story of the Civil War is well known, of course, and it is well known^{too} that the slaves were officially freed by the "Emancipation Proclamation". However, many slaves were not actually freed until much later; such was the case of the Lightner slaves.

When the Civil War broke out Abram Sharp was a young, newly married man. He was opposed to slavery, and contrary to the wishes of many members of his family he joined the Union Army. His duties as a cavalry soldier carried him through many parts of the southern states. When he returned from the war the three colored handmaidens were expressing their desire to return south, to the land of their forebearers.

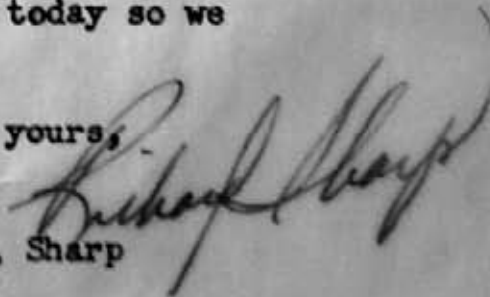
Grandfather Abe volunteered to take them. Being an Ex-soldier, of an adventurous sort and only 28 years old, I doubt that it took much persuasion to get him to make the trip.

The trip was made in the summer of 1865 or 66. Two of the slaves rode one horse and "Liz" who was his mother's slave rode behind Grandfather Abe. They were properly outfitted, of course, for the journey and "not knowing what he might run onto" he carried his army pistol. They did not travel the main roads as he ~~was~~ knew the country, and was well able to ride the towpaths, spending the nights at farm homes or wherever lodging was available.

The slaves were set free in ¹³western North Carolina. The actual site is lost in antiquity, but it is thought they were freed in western North Carolina near the Tennessee border. I presume that they had relatives or some connections in that region. Grandfather "Abe" was a musician of sorts, playing both the bugle and the fife. Being somewhat of a sport also, he carried with him, on the trip, a borrowed fife. And as *he* parted company with the slaves he played the fife, and they danced a "hoe-down". "Liz", the Sharp slave, had been educated, to a certain extent, by the family and corresponded with them for many years thereafter.

No record was kept of Grandfather "Abe's" trip back to Frost but my father was born some 14 years later and I am here today so we know that he did make it.

Sincerely yours,


Richard A. Sharp

P.S. How for the "run-down" on the Sharp generation? ?